



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture
NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE
In Cooperation with Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Virginia Field Office
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Nov. 14, 2018

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TWO NASS SURVEYS SET COUNTY ESTIMATES

RICHMOND, Va. – NASS conducts more than 400 surveys each year, but two of our larger and more impactful surveys are our annual Row Crops County Agricultural Production Survey and December Agricultural Survey, the results of which are combined to set our county average yields.

“NASS sets a goal of 80 percent response rate for all surveys but the more responses we receive, the better, and more accurate our data will be,” said Herman Ellison, Virginia State Statistician. “This is particularly important for these two surveys, because if we don’t receive enough reports, we can’t publish county estimates.”

The Row Crops CAPS surveys about 5,000 farmers in Virginia to find out their acres planted, acres harvested and production of corn, soybeans, hay (alfalfa and other), tobacco (flue-cured, burley and dark fire-cured), cotton and peanuts. This survey is mailed out Nov. 16; the data collection period goes through early January.

The December Agricultural Survey asks an additional 1,500 Virginia farmers how many acres of crops they planted, how many acres they harvested and their yield per acre. This survey was mailed out Nov. 16; data is collected Nov. 28 through Dec. 12.

NASS’s county estimates are used with other USDA agencies’ estimate calculations to set standards for insurance and risk protection programs many farmers rely on to protect their operations. Farm Service Agency (FSA) relies on county-level estimates for Agricultural Risk Coverage (ARC), County Loan Rates, and its disaster program calculations. The Risk Management Agency (RMA) uses the data for administering the Area Risk Protection Insurance Plan, and establishment of transitional yields.

When drought, excessive rain and flooding impact crop production, or even in a year with good yields, these data are crucial to the agriculture industry.

Farmers have asked how sampling is selected and conducted. Farms are randomly selected for the surveys with selection to account for all counties and commodities. Producers are only selected for one of the surveys calculating county estimates during this survey period. A specific question we’ll get is why aren’t all farmers queried? The short answer is that we don’t have enough dollars to survey every farmer and still get a representative response, so we draw a representative subset of the total. Additionally with more than 400 surveys a year, how many farmers are going to be excited to see

another survey in the mailbox or another enumerator pulling up to their house? We try to be judicious of our farmers' time and the taxpayers' money.

Once we have all the reported data, it's reviewed for reasonableness and verifications are made, if necessary. Summaries combine farm data to allocate previously released state production and acreage totals to counties. Average yield equals county production divided by county harvested acres.

NASS offers a four-pronged approach for farmers to respond to surveys: Mail-in, respond over the phone, face-to-face interviews, and reply online. Follow-up phone calls began Nov. 28, if we hadn't received a response in the mail or online. If you receive a call to answer a survey and aren't able to access your records or it's not a good time, we encourage you to make an appointment for a convenient time to respond.

If you have any questions or concerns, we are always available to help. Herman Ellison can be reached in our Richmond office at (804) 771-8560 or Herman.Ellison@usda.gov.

We want to provide the most accurate, reliable data, and that's why we encourage you to make your voices heard. We need your responses to better serve you and your operations. Respond and be counted!

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NASS provides accurate, timely, and useful statistics in service to U.S. agriculture. We invite you to provide occasional feedback on our products and services. Sign up at <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/subscriptions> and look for "NASS Data User Community."

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